

this book is not a confession.

it's what i wrote when i ran out of
people to lie to.

I: the echo begins

i don't remember deciding to write this.
maybe i just started bleeding and
thought that i might as well trace the
trail.

i've been sitting inside my skull for
years now.
rent-free, but somehow still bankrupt.
every thought walks in with muddy
boots, and i thank it for visiting.

there's no plot here. no protagonist
either. i'm not telling a story. i'm just
writing down what rots loudest.
random blabbers as i call them.

if anything feels poetic, it's probably a
fever. if anything feels profound, it's
probably a misdiagnosis.

this isn't a book. it's just me tapping the
glass from inside.

sometimes i'll scream.
sometimes will i whisper.
sometimes just leave the page blank
and hope you hear that too.

some entries will lie to you.
some will lie to me.
some will lie to themselves.
some won't even show up for work.

but they'll all mean something
to the silence that survives after.

II: vestiges

sometimes i think if i disappeared, only
the dust on my bookshelf would notice.
i've outlived too many versions of
myself to still call this living. but i stay.
mostly out of habit. partially out of
hope.

and a little because it's better to be
better than not be better.

there's something quietly humiliating
about remembering how much i used to
care. i used to write letters no one asked
for, to people who wouldn't have
noticed if i vanished. now i just collect
reasons to stay quiet. the silence settles
deeper than any explanation.

i've been trying to trace back where
exactly i stopped trusting peace. maybe
it was the day i smiled too wide and
someone called it strange. maybe it was
when the light hit my room wrong and i
thought,

*"ah. here comes the melancholy again,
punctual as ever."*

i do not heal. i rearrange the wreckage
until it looks intentional. and when
someone calls it growth, i nod.

i remember a boy named Tareq from
somewhere.

he once carved the word "enough" into
the underside of a park bench with the
edge of a broken key.

i asked him what it meant.

he said, *"depends what day you read it on."*

he had a quiet voice which he wore like
it was armour. when he cried, it looked
like something sacred had collapsed
inside him. we only spoke twice.

maybe that's why i think about him
more than people i loved. maybe it's
easier to carry strangers in your chest
than to hold on to someone who stayed.

this is the kind of thing you don't tell
your therapist,

how some nights i argue with the ceiling
like it owes me answers. how i feel more
guilt for being numb than for being
cruel. how i once held someone like they
were a secret, then forgot what i was
protecting them from.

i write because talking never learned
how to listen.

and because my thoughts are not loyal,
they just return when i'm not my best.

this morning i stepped into the sunlight
and felt nothing. so i took a picture.
proof, i guess, that i was there. that i still
cast a shadow.

a man once told me the secret to life was
detachment. i asked if that meant not
caring.

he laughed and said, *"no, it means not
expecting care in return."*

his name was Basel. he ran a quiet
antique shop and poured coffee like it
was holy.

said he stopped praying when God
started answering with silence. said it
taught him patience.

and then he looked at me for a bit and
added,

*"and loneliness too, but that part doesn't
sell as well."*

sometimes, i dream of every version of
myself sitting around a fire, each one
arguing they were the real me.

none of them win. the fire goes out. and
i wake up sweating.

most of life feels like a prologue to
something i never quite reached.

but i keep dressing up my ruins.

polishing the tombstones. watering the
dead plants.

III: parallax

truth has no spine. it bends to whoever's
speaking loudest. so i learned to
whisper. to myself, mostly.

it's strange how we believe things not
because they're true but because we'd
fall apart if they weren't.

some days i wake up ready to change
the world.

other days i wake up and change my
shirt and that's beyond enough.

the mirror doesn't lie.
it just doesn't explain itself either.

the problem with thinking too much is
that the mind becomes its own echo
chamber. a place where you argue with
your own voice and still lose.

they say it's all in your head. but where
else would it be? the soul's just a myth
to make pain poetic.

there was a man named Zayd who
made tea for ghosts. he lived in an
upstairs apartment with no electricity,
but three clocks all wrong in different
ways. every evening, he'd light a candle,
boil water, and pour two cups.

one for himself. one for the silence.

once, someone asked if he believed in
spirits.

he said, *"no. i believe in memory. and
memory's a far crueler ghost."*

they found his journals after he died.
mostly recipes and short conversations
written on the margins.

Zayd: are you still angry?

**Ghost: i'm not angry. i just miss being
real.**

i think about that sometimes.

how we build relationships with the
invisible.

how every goodbye sounds the same in
your head: *"stay."*

there's comfort in contradiction. i don't
trust people who speak in straight lines.
give me the ones who doubt mid-
sentence, who change their minds
between sips of tea.

what if the sky was never meant to be
looked at for answers? what if it's just a
ceiling? high enough to dream under,
but too far to touch without losing
yourself?

maybe the divine isn't found in thunder,
but in the silence between two people
who understand each other without
speaking.

some things weren't made to be figured
out.

only noticed. only carried.

like the ache in your chest when you
hear an old song, or the way dust
dances in light when the room is quiet.

IV: the quiet beneath

sometimes silence isn't the absence of
noise, it's the refusal to speak.

there's a kind of quiet that settles in the
bones,
not peaceful, not loud, just *there*.
like a room you never meant to enter,
but now live in.

people say everything happens for a
reason.
but sometimes things just happen. and
the reason only shows up when you're
too tired to care.

i used to think clarity was a light.
now it's just darkness that's stopped
lying.

every version of me still lives
somewhere.
the kid who thought forever was a real
word.
the one who mistook anger for

independence.

the one who talks too much when he's
uninterested.

none of them left.

they just sit around in my mind, by the
fireside perhaps, passing each other
awkward looks.

Amin once found a box in a courtyard,
under an almond tree whose fruit never
ripened. he didn't build it, didn't steal it.
just found it.

a quiet thing. wood darkened over time,
edges softened by weather.

he never opened it. not once.

carried it across cities, through
checkpoints, over borders no one maps.
people asked what was inside.

he'd smile and say, *"things that don't
speak unless you listen wrong."*

some thought it was a metaphor.
others, a weight he didn't know how to
put down.

he aged. the box didn't. the corners
frayed on his clothes, but not the wood.

when he passed, they found the box
beside him, untouched.
inside, a folded scrap of fabric wrapped
around a stone. on the fabric, faint
handwriting, worn and sun-bitten:

*"i stayed. even when i didn't want to.
that has to count for something."*

no signature. no explanation.

they buried the box with him.
not out of respect. just because no one
else wanted to carry it.

i don't trust people who are never tired.
fatigue is proof that you tried. and
trying is all that ever mattered.

sometimes i miss things that never
happened.

conversations i imagined.

moments i hoped would unfold but
didn't.

memory doesn't care for fact; it just
wants something to hold onto.

i once sat with a man who said nothing
for three hours. when he left, i felt more
heard than i ever had before.

the quiet beneath isn't empty.

it's just waiting for you to stop filling it
with things that don't matter.

only then does it speak,
softly, slowly, like it's been there the
whole time.

V: the slow forgetting

there are things that don't leave
suddenly.

they fade like steam on a mirror,
slow, gradual, pretending they were
never there to begin with. i think
forgetting is a form of mercy.
not for the one who remembers,
but for the thing that wants to be let go.

i once knew a boy who used to
memorize train timetables just to feel
like something made sense.
he said, "*at least the trains come when they
say they will.*"

he later stopped showing up on time.
i guess even trains disappoint.

some memories don't age, they just
hide.

you feel them in the background,
like a radio playing in another room,
too faint to be understood, too loud to
ignore.

the past does not knock.
it waits.
by windows, under eyelids,
behind the smell of matches and second-
hand books.
it doesn't need permission.
just a moment when your guard drops.

we don't forget,
we misplace.

people don't vanish.
they just get harder to imagine.

i keep photos of things i do not miss
anymore.
not because i want to remember,
but because i don't trust myself not to.

nostalgia is a trick mirror. it makes you
miss what never was, and forgive what
never apologized. the worst part of
losing someone is that your version of
them still wakes up inside you. asks the

same questions. waits for the same
answers.

the slow forgetting is not silence.
it's noise beneath skin.
a name you haven't said aloud in years
still echoing like it never stopped.

VI: ordinary ghosts

some people die without dying. they
slip into the spaces between your
errands, the gaps in your conversations,
the pauses between songs on shuffle.
not because you mourn them but
because they once meant something and
now, they don't. and that kind of
vanishing leaves a colder mark than
death ever could.

i once met a girl who measured her
happiness in the length of her silences.
*"if i don't need to talk," she said, "it means
nothing is upsetting loud enough."*

she left her city with no announcement.
just packed up, bought a one-way ticket,
and didn't even leave a note. only a
plant on my windowsill with a tag that
said: *don't name things that leave.*

i sit where you sat.
not to feel close,
just to test if the silence remembers you.

i wear your jacket in the rain
not because it's warm,
but because memory leaks slower
through cotton.

i pass your stop on the train
and look out the window like it's a
grave that never got a headstone.

i don't believe in spirits,
but i believe in leftovers,
your scent in a drawer,
your breath in a voicemail,
your logic in my voice
when i argue with no one.

you left nothing behind.
but somehow,
i'm still finding you
in the parts of me
you never asked for.

i've been thinking lately about how many of my decisions weren't really decisions. just default reactions to pressure. and how most people don't change, they just get better at acting like they have.

truth be told, i don't know if i'm honest or just exhausted enough to stop lying.

people say healing is nonlinear. but no one talks about how it loops. how you think you've moved on from your past, and then a phrase, a sentence, a stupid movie pulls you back like a leash you forgot you were wearing.

there's no closure. only distance.
and even that feels fake.

Amin appears again, briefly. he's older now. he sits at a worn table in a café that doesn't play music. he doesn't look up when the door opens. he writes something on a napkin and leaves it behind.

the waiter throws it away. never reads
it. just tosses it in with the rest of the
day's trash.

i picked it up once after he left, it read:
i only ever wanted to be understood once.
i put it into my coat's pocket.

you don't get over things. you just get
better at carrying them without
flinching. and if you're lucky, someone
else carries a piece with you. not
because they have to. but because they
recognize the weight.

VII: the chair in the corner

there is always one.
a chair in the corner, unoccupied,
unnoticed, unbothered. not decorative.
not dysfunctional.
just there, as if it belongs to someone
who never arrives.

you'll find it in waiting rooms, in
bedrooms, in back alleys of memory.
sometimes it's wooden, chipped at the
edges like a story too often retold.
sometimes plastic, cold and indifferent.
sometimes a stool, humble and arched
under the weight of imagined burdens.

people never ask who it's for. they
assume it's for no one. or worse: for
them, if the room fills too much.
but the chair does not serve people. it
serves absence.

there is something blessed about things
that exist quietly. the kind of sacred that
doesn't need scripture, just time.

no one speaks to the chair, but it hears
everything.

no one looks at it, but it watches how
people fold and unfold their lives
around it.

it's always watching. always
remembering.

once, long ago or maybe only last week,
i sat in such a chair.

not because i needed rest, but because it
felt like the only thing that wouldn't
judge silence.

the chair

not to the room, nor to the people.

but to the silence that made the room
possible.

i've come to believe there are people
who live like chairs in corners. the ones
who do not speak unless spoken to, who
don't enter conversations, only weather
them. they do not shine. they do not
shout.

but they outlast everyone.

and when they're gone, something
collapses in the balance of the room. not
loudly but not enough for anyone to
notice right away.

but eventually, someone stares at the
empty space and says,

"wasn't there... something there?"

and nobody answers.

because the chair would never speak for
itself.

and now, it no longer needs to.

VIII: the echo of glass cities

there are cities that rise not from earth,
but from silence.

glass cities.

built on the ruins of things never said.

towers of restraint, alleys of unsent

letters, windows smeared with

hesitation.

they are not found on maps.

they exist in the space between two

people who almost understood each
other.

i once lived in one.

or maybe i only dreamt it during the

stretch of a dull afternoon. it had no

flags, no anthem, no time zone.

only reflections: infinite, hollow,

brilliant.

like walking through a museum of

yourself,

except you're the only visitor,

and everything on display is still alive.

the streets glowed not from neon or sun,
but from the cold shimmer of unshed
emotion.

buildings leaned inward, listening.
even the shadows moved with grace.
they, too, had learned the art of holding
back.

every resident wore a different mask,
not for deception, but as self-defence.

when everything is made of glass,
you don't run, you glide.
you don't shout, you hum.
you don't love, you hover.

and still, the city pulses with yearning.
not for freedom, not for revolution. but
for a crack.

just one honest fracture to let something
in that wasn't curated.

i met a woman there.
her name was Luma.

not her real name but names mean
nothing in a glass city. they're just labels
to help us forget we're all mirrors.
Luma didn't speak much.
but her silences were architectural.
you could build houses out of the
weight of them.

she once told me:

*"i don't fear breaking. i fear no one noticing
when i do."*

and i remembered thinking,
yes. that's the tragedy we never write
about,
not the collapse, but the applause that
follows it
because people thought it was art.

and when i left the city or woke from it,
i found glass shards in the folds of my
coat.
tiny ones.
enough to catch the light,
not enough to hurt.

and sometimes, in a different city,
under a different sky,
i'll hear a sound, a soft, fragile hum
and i'll turn,
certain that the city is still echoing me.

IX: mirrors in the marrow

some truths don't speak.

they ache.

in the soft bone behind every smile,
there's a mirror not of glass, but of
memory. no face shows in it. only
shadows, silhouettes of decisions never
made. every time you hesitate, the
mirror thickens. every time you lie, it
fractures a little. and when you finally
speak what you've never said, it fogs.

there's a quiet violence in becoming.

i remember a boy who never spoke
unless asked. he would nod when it was
time to eat, and shrug when asked what
he wanted to be. but every morning, he
drew maps. on the backs of notebooks,
on margins of borrowed books. places
that did not exist, with roads that
curved like questions, oceans with
names like "*maybe*" and "*later*."
when his mother asked what it meant,

he said nothing.
and years later, when i met him again,
that same silence clung to him.
he now mapped systems. economies.
networks. efficient paths. but the oceans
were gone.

we grow into precision and out of
wonder.
we learn the answers and forget how to
ask.

what if we stayed vague?

what if we chose not to harden into
clarity, but to blur just enough like
fogged glass under breath. so someone
might press their hand on the other side
and feel warmth instead of reflection?

sometimes i think people don't change.
they just rearrange the furniture of their
pain.

i spoke once with an old man in Aleppo,
who sold spoons. tiny ones, made of
olive wood. each carved with the name

of a place that didn't exist anymore.

"what are these for?" i asked.

*"for forgetting," he said. "or remembering.
depending on the guest."*

philosophy isn't in books. it's in the
pause before an answer, in the decision
to not finish the story, in the hunger that
isn't for food.

the marrow does not lie. it breaks. it
burns.

but it does not lie.

and what about the mirrors there?

well... maybe they're not for seeing
yourself.

maybe they're for seeing who's missing.

X: the sky i never looked at

i remember the way my neck refused to tilt upward. as if some part of me had signed a quiet contract with gravity: to only carry the weight and never question where it fell from.

the sky was always there, yes. but i didn't ask it anything. didn't watch its moods or read its riddles. i kept my eyes level, focused on street corners, keys, and dates that kept slipping off the calendar. it wasn't avoidance. it was resignation.

there are things you stop reaching for when you're too used to being left unanswered.

and then, one evening, Zayd said,
*"you ever think the sky gets lonely?
all those stars, so far apart. blinking, yes,
definitely blinking, but never touching.
maybe that's why they flicker. maybe it's
envy."*

i didn't reply. we just stood there, backs to a wall, his words hanging between us like fog in a field. i didn't look up even then.

there are skies over cities, and skies over ruins.

some beg for attention, others wear their silence like a veil. i wonder which one is mine.

God is in the heavens.

he's watching, he knows i never stared long enough to see him.

sometimes, i think the sky is more honest than people.

it doesn't pretend to be consistent. it storms. it clears. it disappears behind smog. and yet, at the end of the day, it's always there. isn't that more devotion than most of us ever manage?

i once read a boy's diary. he'd drawn clouds every day for a year. no words,

just shapes. cumulus. cirrus. one even
looked like a chess piece melting. on the
last page, he wrote:

*"maybe the sky is how the world remembers
its dreams."*

i wonder when i stopped dreaming
mine.

maybe around the time i started
walking faster. maybe when my
questions turned into checklists. maybe
when the word "someday" became
"should've."

i still don't look up very often.
but on the days i do. the sky doesn't
scold. it just waits.

and i think that counts for something.

XI: the old windmills

the path to the windmills is more
memory than road. cobbled in places,
overgrown in others. like something
forgotten by time but not forgiven.

there are five of them, each leaning in a
different direction, as though trying to
listen to winds that no longer speak.
they stand not like giants, but like old
men: stubborn, weathered, bowed but
not broken. their blades turn lazily,
more out of habit than purpose, and
every creak is a language no one speaks
anymore.

Amin walks the path each morning,
bucket in hand, oil can tucked beneath
his arm. he used to be a boy who ran
through these fields with clementines in
his pockets. now he drags one foot
behind the other like he's dancing with
ghosts. he doesn't believe in much
anymore. not Gods. not futures. but he

believes in wood, in rust, in the
satisfaction of mending something that
might fall apart without you.

when asked why he tends to them, his
answer never changes, *"because they're
still here."*
and that is enough.

he has no children. no spouse. no village
that remembers his full name. just these
five windmills, and the silence they
teach him to endure. the wind never
arrives the way it used to. now it merely
grazes past, like someone brushing your
sleeve but never meeting your eyes.

there's a boy, Zayd, maybe eight, maybe
eleven, who watches from the edge of
the hill. every few days he'll sit cross-
legged on a rock and say nothing, just
stare. Amin nods but never speaks.
words get in the way of remembering.

one day, after a long storm that failed to
water anything, Zayd finally asks,
"why do you fix things no one uses?"

Amin doesn't turn. doesn't stop
tightening the blade joint. *"because it's
better to be something to someone than
nothing to no one,"* he says.
and the boy thinks on that like it's a
riddle, like it might explode in his chest
later.

he doesn't know Amin once carved that
same line into the wooden panel of the
fourth windmill, during a night of
thunder when he thought he might
disappear in the morning.

a poet once passed through here. he left
a verse carved into the oldest blade,
where no one sees unless they climb.

*we do not spin to win,
we spin because the stillness
would kill us.*

Amin found it a decade later, smiled at it like a mirror, and never talked of it again.

some say windmills are relics.
monuments to a time when energy came
from the honest push of air and effort.
but maybe they're more than that.
maybe they're the last creatures that
haven't given up.
they still move, however slowly.
they still breathe in circles, as if motion
were a kind of prayer.

Amin's coat grows thinner, his beard
greyer. but his hands remain steady.
oiling, hammering, tightening. each
action its own hymn. and though no
grain has been ground here in decades,
though no one drinks from the dry
cistern beneath, something in him insists
that presence alone is preservation.

we are not all meant to invent. some of
us are meant to remember. some of us

are the keepers of ruins that never asked
to be saved.

and maybe the windmills aren't the
ones being fixed.
maybe they're fixing him.

XII: a string of fathers

they were not cruel. they were not evil.
they simply were.

men who rose before the sun and
returned with hands full of dust. men
who measured love in presence, not
words. not once did they explain
themselves. not once did they need to.

a grandfather carried an olive pit in his
pocket for twenty-three years. no one
asked why. it was not the kind of thing
you asked. it was enough that he did. it
meant something, even if the meaning
was private.

they left no letters, only the way to tie a
rope right, the timing of silence between
two sentences, the difference between
being loud and being certain.

inheritance came as routine: the way
one sweeps a courtyard, how one carries

a name like a coin kept warm in the palm. there were no lectures. no burden of legacy, only the soft discipline of doing things the same way every time because that is how they were done.

Zayd once said the men in his family all looked away when speaking. not out of guilt, but out of instinct. *"eye contact,"* he said, *"was too heavy to be casual."*

and i understood. not everything unsaid is a secret. sometimes, it is just a language older than speaking, older than self.

you do not choose what you are made of. but you choose what you do with it.

to be part of a string is not to be tied. it is to know the rhythm of thread and how it runs through you, quiet and unseen.

so let it run.

let it hum beneath the skin.

it is not a burden.

it is an unasked blessing.

XIII: a museum of small endings

i've watched things leave without
slamming the door.

sometimes, silence is the sound of
vanishing.

a shirt no longer worn. a scent that
doesn't stay.

the way a name stops echoing across the
mind.

no funeral, no folding of hands. just the
slow
unthreading of meaning from memory.

i've buried nothing, yet everything has a
grave.

not in soil, but in seconds. the last time
we spoke,

the final time i turned the key in that
lock,

that last walk home without knowing it
was.

the museums are inside us. no tickets,

no hours.

just exhibits that dust themselves
slowly.

sometimes i think people
misunderstand what it means to let go.
they think it's a deliberate act, some
poetic moment of closure,
but often it's just forgetting to return.
you misplace the urgency, then the
ritual.

you stop correcting the way someone
mispronounces your name.
you no longer mind when the tea cools.
the world keeps shifting and you stop
keeping count.

i once knew someone who kept a
drawer of dead pens.
when i asked why, he said, "*they used to
work.*"
that sentence stayed with me longer
than he did.

the museum isn't built from tragedies,
but from things too small to deserve
mourning:
unfinished letters, lost buttons, phone
numbers
never updated, words not said.

we only grieve loud when it's visible,
but some of the saddest things
disappear in lowercase.

letting go isn't a grand gesture. it is
repetition wearing thin. it's stopping
mid-sentence and not returning.
it's the sigh you don't notice escaping
you.
you don't push the past away. it walks
off quietly
when you're not watching.

i've come to understand this:
not everything broken needs fixing.
some things are meant to be un-carried.
some memories, ungathered.

to let go, sometimes, is just
to stop saying "*mine*."

XIV: the room that stayed closed

there's always one door that no one
opens. not because it's locked, not
because they've lost the key but because
some part of them knows what silence
waits behind it.

the house was lived in, loud with
arguments, soft with shared tea, worn
slippers by the door. but this room
stayed untouched. even the dust there
seemed older, as though it had settled
centuries ago and decided never to
leave.

he passed it often. every morning, after
brushing his teeth, he would glance at
the doorknob. brass, dull, unshined. it
never turned. it never called out. but it
remained.

they said the room belonged to his
mother. or maybe his father. or maybe it

belonged to a version of himself he had left behind when he stopped writing letters. no one quite remembered. and no one ever stepped in.

in his dreams, the room expanded. he walked through it like a museum of lives not lived. jackets that didn't fit anymore, a desk with half-filled notebooks, shadows that lingered in the shape of people no longer present. the kind of silence you don't just hear, but feel pressing up against your ribs.

he once placed his ear to the door and heard nothing. and that nothing was louder than any memory.

"you'll rot like that," someone said to him once.

"better to rot on your terms," he replied, *"than bloom in soil not your own."*

they didn't understand what the room meant to him. it wasn't grief. it wasn't guilt. it wasn't even nostalgia. it was the

space he left untouched because touching it would mean confronting the fact that he had once hoped.

some places are not sacred because of what they contain, but because of what they refuse to show.

the room became time. not a moment, but the absence of one. a pause held too long. a breath that was never exhaled.

people say let go. but how do you let go of something that never let you in?

when Zayd came to visit, years later, he asked, *"what's in there?"*

Amin just looked at the door and smiled faintly.

"the version of me that still believed answers could be found."

Zayd nodded, didn't press further. he understood now that some silences were

earned. and some rooms were not
meant to be opened, but remembered.

"maybe one day," Amin said to no one in
particular, *"i'll go in and find it empty."*

"or full," Zayd replied. *"and that might be
worse."*

better to be something to someone than
nothing to no one. but sometimes you
are only something to a room that
waited too long.

the day the house was sold, the new
owners painted the door white. they
opened it, laughed at the dust,
remarked on the smell.

they didn't know it had once held all the
versions of a man who never quite
arrived.

and they never would.

*XV: when the wind turned
warm*

it was somewhere in early march,
maybe late February, when the wind
forgot to be cold. it came like a stranger
knocking with hands full of flowers and
no memory of winter. we weren't ready
for it, not emotionally, not in clothes or
posture. Zayd said it felt like the wrong
kind of kindness, the sort that made you
suspicious of what it wanted in return.

Amin stood outside their grandmother's
house and watched the fig tree tremble.
it had always been a stubborn tree, one
that refused to bloom before its time.
but there it was, already heavy with the
early hints of fruit. there was something
premature in the air, like a laugh before
the punchline.

they walked to the river, not speaking.
in the warmth, their silence felt less like

mourning and more like a question with too many answers. there were bees out, confused and eager. dust lifting in golden spirals. children throwing pebbles at the sky. nothing was how it should have been, but everything looked beautiful and that made it worse somehow.

Amin said, *"maybe this is what peace feels like before it goes bad."*

Zayd just nodded.

no one wanted to name it happiness.

earlier that week, i had stood in my own corridor, and sunlight had fallen on my arm in a way that made me feel known. not loved just... registered. like the universe had signed its name on me with warmth. and that terrified me.

how dare the world offer comfort now?
what was it preparing me for?

i remembered a poem i wrote years ago
on the back of a receipt:

"the sky grew teeth when it smiled

so i stopped asking it questions."

the wind passed through the old cracks
in the window. it smelled like damp soil
and wild oranges.

i closed my eyes and it touched my face,
like something trying to say sorry for
what it had done.

and for a moment, i let it.

because maybe, just maybe, it's better to
be something to someone, rather than
being nothing to no one.

*XVI: a sky that forgot to turn
blue*

sometimes the day would begin with a kind of pale uncertainty, the sort that made you squint at the horizon as if colour were a privilege and the morning hadn't earned it yet. there were clouds, sure, but they weren't moving. they were anchored in place like things unsaid. like promises half-remembered.

Amin sat on the roof again. he was older now. not old in years but in thoughts, and that counts more in places where the weather forgets how to change. below him, Zayd called out for breakfast, but his voice carried like a thread through thick air; stretched and barely audible. Amin didn't answer. he traced the lip of his tea cup with a thumb and tried to remember the last time the sky had turned a real shade of blue. he couldn't.

maybe colour was for believers. and
Amin had stopped believing.

there's a time when you no longer
grieve, not because the sorrow has
passed, but because you've worn it so
long it begins to feel like your shape.
like the curve of your shadow. like the
slouch in your gait. grief as posture.
grief as weather. grief as colourless sky.

"you remember when it used to rain?"
Zayd asked later, while sitting cross-
legged beside him, tossing pebbles
down into the alley.

"it still rains," Amin replied, *"but only on
the inside."*

Zayd didn't press. they were past the
age where explanations mattered. now
they just lived with metaphors, wearing
them like old jackets, each torn at the
cuff.

*there are seasons that visit other people.
ours got lost on the way.*

one evening, they found a radio that worked. it crackled foreign songs in tongues they didn't speak, but it made the walls feel less alone. they kept it on, even when they couldn't understand. the static was a friend, the kind who stayed even when you didn't speak. the kind who didn't ask you to be okay.

Amin began painting again. not walls, not canvases. just pieces of paper. scraps, margins, back covers of old books. he didn't paint skies or trees or faces. only one thing: a window.

again and again. a window. sometimes open. sometimes shut. once, barred.

Zayd asked him what it meant. Amin only shrugged.

"maybe i want the sky to knock."

be something to someone, he wrote at the bottom of one window, rather than being nothing to no one.

Zayd smiled when he saw that. *"still pretending to be wise?"* he asked.

"pretending is the only wisdom left."

the sky never did turn blue again. but one day, it rained. not much. just enough to make the dust remember it once came from rivers. enough to make Amin believe, if only briefly, that even a forgotten sky might learn how to weep.

and that, too, was something.

*XVII. the day the orchard
burned*

no one remembered who planted the orchard. not even Amin. not even old Farid, who once claimed the trees whispered their first names to him in sleep. some said the land was cursed, others said it was blessed. either way, the pomegranate trees stood there for decades: dry-skinned, swollen with sun, patient as monks who had given up on the idea of audience.

the orchard never changed and so the world around it did.

on the morning it burned, the sky was the softest shade of surrender. not red, not orange but something like a bruise that had decided to fade. people smelled the smoke before they saw it. by the time Zayd reached the edge of the hill, half the orchard was already

smouldering. the fire eating through memories no one had written down.

no one had lit the match. they all said that.

Amin stood beside the well, silent, as if listening to the crackling branches were a form of prayer. a fig fell behind him, perfectly ripe. he did not flinch. fire, like grief, sometimes arrives without a doorbell.

someone asked later if they cried. Zayd said no but his voice flickered when he did. because it wasn't about the orchard, not really. it was about what it held. the afternoons he had hidden there from the world. the letters carved into the bark that spelled nothing, but felt like everything. the fig he once split in half and gave to someone who never came back.

the orchard had been full of things
people didn't say aloud.

Amin finally spoke that evening, under
a sky now blank as paper. *"maybe it
needed to burn,"* he said, not cruelly.
"maybe it was tired of remembering."

and no one argued.

they never rebuilt it. they planted
nothing new. instead, the land was left
fallow, soft and empty and unashamed.
Zayd visited once, years later, and
found a single wild olive tree growing
crooked from the ash.

a boy was sitting beneath it, humming a
tune with no words.

Zayd sat beside him without asking.

some places forget on purpose. some
silences heal. some fires are not the end,
only a pause. a punctuation in the
middle of a sentence too long to speak.

not every orchard is meant to bloom
forever. and sometimes, letting go is not
weakness, it's the final act of love.

because there are stories that grow too
heavy for the roots to hold.

and because a field that forgets becomes
a field that forgives.

XVIII. the God of small collapses

there is a God who does not live in
cathedrals.

he lives in the moments no one prays
for.

in the crooked bend of a fork dropped
on kitchen tile.

in the sigh you release after pretending
you didn't hear your name called.

in the umbrella that folds the wrong
way in the middle of rain.

in the eighth unread message, left on
"seen".

he is the God of all small collapses.

i met him once. in a train station where i
had no business being, watching
strangers reunite like they were scenes
in a movie i had been written out of.

he sat beside me, this 'God', faceless yet
familiar, like the way pain always

knows your address.

he did not speak, but somehow i knew
what he meant: **this too is holy.**

people talk about breakdowns like
avalanches, like violent, vigorous
disasters.

but the truth is, most ruin arrives gently.
in the form of "i'm fine."
or "it's nothing."
or "i just forgot."

what they don't say is:

i wept in the cereal aisle.

i wore the same socks three days in a
row.

i walked home the long way to delay
being alone.

i rewrote a text message sixteen times
and never sent it.

and maybe that's okay.

maybe there is something sacred about
these micro-deaths.

not everything needs to be a war to be
worth surviving.

i still remember Zayd's hands, always
busy. folding napkins into birds,
twisting bottle caps until they snapped,
breaking and building, like someone
afraid of stillness.

he used to say,

*"things fall apart for a reason. sometimes
just to remind us we're holding on too
tightly."*

and then he'd smile that sideways smile
like he didn't believe himself.

Zayd was the kind of boy who never fell
all at once.

he crumbled by degrees.

one day he stopped answering calls.
another, he stopped remembering
birthdays.

then one morning, he left his window
open during a storm and let the wind
have its way with his books.

"they were starting to feel too sure of themselves," he said.

i didn't know how to help someone unravelling so quietly. so i matched his silence with mine.

some nights, i light a candle for no one. i open old notebooks and underline the sentences that once hurt.

i read text messages like letters from a poet that used to know me.

and in those moments, i feel it.
a soft presence beside me, watching without judgment. the God of small collapses, again.

he does not fix me.

he does not offer miracles.

but he makes the quiet feel less cruel.

he blesses the ache in my spine, the stale coffee on my desk, the plant i forgot to water.

and maybe that's enough.

maybe holiness isn't found in rising, but
in the beauty of falling apart, **delicately,**
deliberately, and without shame.

let them have their raves and
redemptions.

i will lay here,
among the crumpled receipts, the bitten
fingernails,
the to-do lists that never get done.

i will lay in lowercase.
in unfinished thoughts.
in the ordinary ways i keep failing,
beautifully.

because even despair, when held softly,
begins to sound like prayer.

IXX: where i buried my name

there was once a version of me who
answered too quickly. a wave too eager
to crash into the shore.

a soul shaped more by reflection than
presence

mirrored in the eyes of others until it
mistook the glass for skin.

people saw a shape and gave it
meaning.

they dressed it in assumptions, stitched
from quick glances, sewed entire
histories into my silence.

i became their metaphor.

a walking suggestion.

a summary with no author.

no one ever asked if the body beneath
the summary agreed.

they thought i was kind.

i nodded.

they thought i was dangerous.

i nodded.

they thought i was broken.

i nodded.

they wanted to write their poems on me.

so i gave them blank pages and sat still.

i thought stillness was safety.

but it was just another shape for erasure.

there's a certain loneliness that follows

being misunderstood beautifully.

they call you angel when you feel like
ash.

they call you strong when you're
seconds from breaking.

they call you wise when you've
forgotten how to breathe.

and you start living up to these
strangers,

because their belief is louder than your
own doubt.

because it's easier to play along than to
shatter the myth.

because sometimes, being adored

wrongly
hurts less than being unseen entirely.

but it is not peace.

peace is being known and staying.

peace is being ugly in someone's
memory

and still being allowed to return.

peace is not a chorus of admirers.

it is one voice that says:

*i saw you. all of you. and it did not break
me.*

i no longer look in mirrors for
confirmation.

i look for contradiction.

i want to be reminded that i am not any
one thing.

not soft or cruel or clever or lost

but all of it, crumpled, unfolding,

like a letter addressed to nowhere.

the strangers still call me things.

they still point and speak in confident

tones.

i no longer answer.

i watch them name smoke
and believe they've caught fire.

there is a place beyond perception,
a quiet room where the self un-clenches.
where you do not have to perform grief
or joy or intelligence or control.
where you are not the sum of reactions,
not a mirror, not a silhouette filled in by
a thousand others.

just a pulse.

just a moment.

just a you that needs no introduction.

i will meet myself there someday,
at the edge of myth and silence.
and i will not ask who i've been.
only whether i am free now.

XX: *languages i couldn't
speak*

i've always believed that silence had
dialects.

there are sentences that never leave the
throat
not because they lack words,
but because they refuse translation.
they lose truth in transit.

i've sat in rooms where tongues danced
like fire.
English twirled beside Arabic,
French curled its vowels like secrets,
Urdu sighed in ink.
and, i, i remained outside the
conversation,
holding a phrase that meant everything
but had no synonym.

i learned English first.
not because it was mine,

but because it was required.
to pass, to present, to be presentable.

still, i write poems with borrowed
grammar,
still, my metaphors wear second hand
coats.

still, i call it *love* when what i mean is
huzn,
the ache behind the teeth
that makes no sound.

a man once whispered *je t'aime* to me
like it was sacred.
he didn't know
what i heard in my head.
there's a difference.
one declares,
the other surrenders.

there are things the English language
cannot carry.
like the velvet of *mehfil*,
a gathering not just of people,
but of warmth, of gazes held like wine.

or *wajd*, that ecstatic, fevered surrender
to music,
the trance beyond meaning.

once, someone asked me why i was so
quiet.

i said: *i speak in delay*.

some emotions need subtitles.

some memories never learned a tongue.

i met a girl who laughed in Moroccan
Arabic.

her joy sounded like prayer.

i told her,

you make happiness look like a ritual.

she said, *what does your laughter sound
like?*

i didn't answer.

there's a word in Farsi,

nafas-gir, it means breath-stealing.

i use it for places that hold me too
tightly, for cities that don't translate me
right.

i never knew how to ask for what i
needed.

not in any tongue.

can you stay?

was i ever real to you? am i real?

these questions fell between my lips like
prayers

too ashamed to be spoken aloud.

when i read Rumi,

i don't want to translate him.

his words don't ask to be understood.

they ask to be felt.

some evenings are built in silences

not loneliness,

but the sacred hush before language
arrives.

i sat once by a stranger

in a station in Istanbul.

he said nothing,

but nodded at the call to prayer.

and for a moment,

we were fluent in the same stillness.

i've written letters
in languages i never learned
not because i wanted to be understood,
but because i didn't.

there is something holy
in not being decoded.

not everything needs to be pronounced.
some truths survive only in absence.
in the lines never spoken,
in the breath before the answer,
in the eyes asking
are you still here?

some languages live in the body,
a brush of the shoulder,
a heartbeat skipped at the wrong time,
a song hummed at the window
when the world thinks you're asleep.

i don't speak all the tongues i wish i did.
but i have met people who taught me
new words
without ever opening their mouths.

i translate myself daily.

into silence.

into echo. into things that refuse to be
written.

because sometimes,
the language i need most
is the one i cannot speak.

*XXI: the balcony that saw
everything*

from the balcony, i saw a boy draw
invisible constellations into the dust
with his finger then wipe them away
like they'd never mattered. he stared up
at the sky, unsure if the stars were late,
or simply no longer performing for him.
i remember thinking: *some absences arrive
too quietly to mourn.*

from the balcony, i saw a man return
every evening with a bag of nothing in
his hand. he unpacked silence like it was
sacred. an extra chair waited beside him,
never spoken to, never filled. that's how
most prayers look from a distance.

from the balcony, i saw a girl lean into
windless days with her hair tied up like
restraint. she read the same page for
weeks, her finger hovering over the
same sentence. i couldn't read it, but i

remember thinking: she must be looking for the place where language fails.

from the balcony, i saw Zayd walking backwards. not literally. just the way he moved, like someone still negotiating with memory. his shoulders spoke more than his face. he passed the old staircase where Amin once said, *"not everything that echoes deserve an answer."* i remember that line. it's been ringing ever since.

from the balcony, i saw a curtain move without a breeze. that house had been empty for years. or maybe just unvisited. there's a difference. some places aren't abandoned, just remembered differently.

from the balcony, i saw a child hold his shadow against the wall like a painting he was afraid would fade. he stood there until dusk erased it for him. he didn't cry. he didn't move. that kind of

loss teaches you about the mercy of
blur.

from the balcony, i saw myself, not now,
but then, leaning against rusted railings
with a notebook i never wrote in. just
watching, like a ghost yet to die.
somewhere in the pages, i had once
written: "*to live is to rehearse forgetting.*" i
didn't know what it meant until that
day.

from the balcony, i saw the street
become myth. the same old lamp, still
flickering. the same cracked pavement,
still waiting. the pigeons still fighting
over a windowsill no one owns. some
scenes don't change, only the names of
those not watching.

from the balcony, i saw arguments
repeat like ritual. doors slammed with
the finality of punctuation marks.
laughter spilt down staircases, then
vanished like a dream mid-sentence.

every moment tried to become memory,
even if no one asked it to.

from the balcony, i saw no one tonight.
just a light switch flipped off in the
apartment across the lane. but it felt
heavy. like a final line. or maybe just an
unfinished poem.

*XXII: a boy who wanted to
live forever*

a boy once stood at the edge of the sky
with his mouth open, as if trying to
drink the wind.

he carved his name into the bark of
trees,

not out of pride, but panic.

as if forgetting himself would undo the
fact that he ever was.

he thought that if a name lived in
enough places,

a body could vanish and still be
remembered.

he built stone towers from riverbed
bones,

mapped stars into mud with his fingers,
wrote his secrets in steam on cold glass.

he counted every second like a miser,
hoarding the moment

like it could be spent again later.
but time doesn't do refunds.

they called him ambitious.
they said he'd go far.
but all he ever wanted was to stop time
mid-sentence,
before it could take anything else from
him.
he was afraid of being left behind,
so he tried to stay everywhere at once.
a smudge on every page.
a flicker in every dream.

he once traced the outline of his
shadow,
then ran from it,
thinking maybe that was how you
escaped yourself.
but the shadow was always smarter
than him.
it waited at the next sunrise
to begin again.

from the rooftop,
he whispered prayers not to God,
but to permanence.
dear future, he wrote,

please remember me better than i was.
he learned to speak in monuments,
to cry in architecture.
built himself a kingdom of almos
and ruled like a ghost.

every lover he ever held,
he tried to sculpt into memory.
not with hands but with words.
each smile a paragraph,
each goodbye a full stop he refused to
place.

in dreams, he was a boy made of
mirrors.
each reflection a different version of
himself
trying to live longer than the last.

he feared death,
but more than that,
he feared being ordinary.
he believed the worst thing in the world
was to be forgettable.
so he became a museum of unfinished

things.
half-sketched canvases,
stories with no ending,
laughter cut short by the sound of
clocks.

he buried himself in paper,
thinking if he disappeared in ink,
at least someone might read him
and resurrect the outline.

sometimes i wonder if the boy was
Zayd.

sometimes i think he was me.
but most days, i know he was no one.
just a myth built by people afraid to
fade quietly.

just a poem written by time to mock us
for thinking we could outwrite it.

and still,
when the wind brushes past me softly at
dusk,
i hear footsteps.
bare. blistered. stubborn.

and i wonder
if he's still running somewhere
chasing his own name across a sky
that never promised to keep it.

they say he wanted to live forever.
but really,

he just didn't want to leave
before being seen.

and that,
perhaps,
is how forever begins,
with someone too afraid to end.

*XXIII: i don't recall who
loved first*

i remember a cracked glass left on the
floor.

two teeth marks in an apple that never
browned.

someone once asked if the rain sounded
lonely today.

i think it did.

but i couldn't be sure if it was the rain or
us.

love, when it was here, didn't knock.

it entered without shoes. it left the door
open.

sometimes it curled up beside us like a
second shadow. sometimes it
disappeared into a sentence we never
finished.

you liked quiet things.

so i became one.

i liked honest things.

so you told me stories with your eyes
closed.

there was no clear beginning.
just a softness that grew claws.
i wanted permanence, you brought
mirrors.
you wanted clarity, i brought fog.
we both built a place
neither of us knew how to live in.

in another version of us,
we never say hello.
we pass each other in a hallway full of
open doors.
i'm holding a memory you never made.
you're smiling at a ghost that never
looked like me.

i try to remember the first time i looked
at you and thought: **this could last.**
but it always slips,
like rain from hands held too open.

some loves don't leave.
they just change address.

some memories forget what they're
made of
and keep breathing anyway.

maybe you loved me first.
maybe i never did.
maybe we just needed something to
ruin gently.
something to walk away from
without turning around.

in the end,
there was no end.
just the slow collapse of a sentence
we both forgot how to speak.

*XXIV: the anatomy of a
beautiful lie*

the first lie i ever told wasn't a sentence.
it was a posture.
shoulders straight. voice even. eyes dry.

they clapped.
and so i became a playwright.

we like to think lies are ugly.
that they rot and smell like guilt.
but that's only true when they're bad at
their jobs.
the real ones, the beautiful ones, they
shine.
they wear perfume and good lighting.
they rehearse in private mirrors.
they enter the room before you do.

i've carried mine for so long,
i sometimes forget what it was
protecting.
a cracked door? a sob i wasn't brave
enough to sob?

or just the possibility of being
misunderstood too deeply to be
forgiven?

a lie has bones:
white little ribs of what we *almost* said,
spines made of stretched truths,
a skull full of soft edits.

it has skin too, smooth and believable.
warmed by the friction of how often we
repeat it.

and yes,
it has a name.
but you won't find it in any diary.
only in the spaces between what we
remember and what we admit.

sometimes i wonder:
if i put all my lies in a line, shoulder to
shoulder,
would they look like me?
or would they look like the boy i wanted
to be loved as?

truth sat on my tongue
and never made it to my teeth.
not because i lacked the will
but because the world looked kinder
when i shut my mouth
and nodded.

the most painful part isn't telling the lie.
it is watching people fall in love with it.

they say, *you're so calm. you're so
composed. you're so understanding.*

and i smile politely, letting the version
of me they adore do the heavy lifting.

but inside,
i'm rearranging furniture in a burning
house,
hoping no one smells the smoke.

a man woke up one day and realized he
had forgotten who he was pretending to
be.

he walked into a crowded room and
waited for someone to greet him by the
name he'd worn.
no one did.

his laughter sounded unfamiliar.
his hands didn't recognize the gestures
they made.
he tried to cry, not out of sadness, but
curiosity.
nothing came.

so he sat on a park bench,
watching birds fight over bread.
they didn't need masks.
they didn't need applause.
they just existed, loud and messy and
unremarkable.

and for a moment,
he envied them so completely
he forgot to breathe.

the anatomy of a lie is elegant.
because it was designed to survive.
not to deceive maliciously
but to keep us from falling apart mid-
conversation.

but now and then,
when the night is too quiet,
and the mirrors forget to lie back,
i still ask:

*what did i bury beneath the charm?
and was it ever truly ugly, or
just...unpolished?*

*XXV: nothing important
happens here*

XXVI: paper children and the God complex

i used to call it writing.

but now i know it for what it is. a
sickness.

an unspoken need to play God in small,
manageable doses.

i create people the way lonely men
collect voicemails.

slowly, carefully, and with the
knowledge that they'll never speak back
unless i make them.

and even then, only with the words i've
given them. only with the voices i've
stitched from my own fever.

they're made of sentences and
silhouettes.

i give them favourite colours and
childhood traumas.

i name them after feelings i can't name
myself.

then i wind them up like old clocks and
set them in motion. but they never get
far. they always circle back to me.
begging for the next scene. the next
breath. the next disaster.

some of them grow tired of the loops.
some rebel.
some refuse to die when i ask them to.
others, they just rot inside the paragraph
i forgot to finish.

once, i wrote a boy named Aref.
he lived inside a city i never finished
describing.
i made him afraid of thunder and
deeply loyal to his older brother.
then i killed the brother.
not because the plot needed it.
but because i was having a bad day.

Aref never forgave me.
i never wrote his tears,
so he cried forever in silence.

*"why did you give me so much
grief and nowhere to put it?"*

he once asked, voice cracking
between the lines.

i didn't answer.
i just closed the notebook.

they call them characters.
but they are children.
thin-skinned, ink-blooded children. and
i?

i am their cowardly God, proud of my
storms, ashamed of my sunrises.

i watch them fall in love, then rip it from
them mid-sentence.

i give them mothers and then diseases.
i invent religions just to unteach them
later.

i make them brave only when i need
catharsis.

they are not tools. they are victims.
and i am not a writer.
i am a quiet tyrant dressed in
metaphors.

sometimes, i visit the old ones.
the ones i abandoned mid-arc.
i flip to their pages like forgotten
gravestones.

"you left me in that house,"
says Samira.

"you never told me if the fire
reached the attic."

"was i ever real to you?" Zayd
once whispered,
staring out of a window i
never described.

Amin returned in a dream.
not the real dream kind. just a figment i
conjured because i missed someone like
him.

*"you use us," he said, wiping
glass from his palms,
"you carve us from your
suffering, then get bored when
we start having our own."*

*"i needed you to hurt so i
wouldn't feel so alone," i told
him.*

*"then write yourself next time,"
he said,
"and see how long you can
survive under your own pen."*

why do i do this?

maybe because paper people don't
leave.

they don't grow up. they don't
contradict you with their realness.
they just wait, ink-drunk, for their turn
to feel again.

but it's a trap.
because once you make them feel,
you owe them an ending.
and no matter how you write it,
you'll never give them peace.

you'll close the book,
they'll still be screaming on page
seventy-nine.

i don't think i write to be heard
anymore.
i think i write to be confronted.

by all the little Gods i've created in the
mirror.
by all the children i abandoned when
the plot grew quiet.

and maybe one day
they'll write me back.
and tell me who i really was
before i built this prison of paper people

and crowned myself
a trembling God.

*XXVII: the doctrine of dying
well*

there should be a religion for the dying.
no Gods. no heavens. no punishments.
just a quiet handbook for how to leave
beautifully.

not everyone earns a good death. and
you have not lived well unless you have
died.

most claw at it like it's a mistake.
as if they could edit it like a poorly
written ending.

but some... some walk toward it as if it
were the final dance in a long
performance,
not afraid, just aware that the music is
fading.

i want to be like that.

commandments of mortalism

i. do not hoard your name, let it be whispered by many, not carried like a wound.

ii. when the time comes, leave the door open. someone will want to step through after you.

iii. do not confuse staying alive with living. they are not the same.

iv. prepare your goodbye like a poem: slowly, deliberately, and without shame.

v. carry only what you've made peace with. all else will become noise.

vi. die facing the sun if you can. it's less cruel than a ceiling.

vii. make something that can outlive you. a story, a gesture, a forgiveness.

viii. do not beg time to wait. time is deaf.

ix. mourn yourself while you're still breathing. let the grief pass before death comes.

x. if you loved well, then you
already died beautifully.

i imagine my final moments as a ritual.
no monitors. no sterile hums.
just someone brushing my hair back.
the scent of jasmine. a bell chiming
softly at the window. the whisper of a
friend reading back the best thing i ever
wrote.

and before i leave, i'd like to apologize
to time,
for hating it for so long.
when all it ever did was carry me. but
time doesn't listen to apologies. time is
deaf.

once, Zayd was twelve when he
watched his mother unfold a white
burial cloth.

she had laid it out on the bed,
smoothing the creases with the same
care she used to iron his school uniform.
next to it sat a small wooden box, not
ornate, just old. inside were scent
powders, olive oil, and strings of beads
worn smooth from prayer.

she sat in the afternoon light, touching
the fabric like it was alive.
her fingers moved with memory, not
fear.

*"why do you keep preparing
that?"* Zayd had asked,
unsettled.

*"because one day, they'll use it
for me,"* she said. not sad. not
dramatic. just real.

he didn't understand.
he thought it was morbid.
he avoided the room for days after.

but she returned to the cloth often.
checking it. folding it. sometimes
speaking to it, as if it needed
reassurance too.

she believed in going prepared.
not because death was noble but
because it was certain.

Zayd, of course, ran from it.
he buried his discomfort beneath noise:
games, school, bright distractions.
he made jokes at funerals, kept his eyes
dry, changed the subject when mortality
entered the room.

but still,
he kept that wooden box after she
passed.
quietly. reverently.
tucked away on the top shelf of his
cupboard, above the dust and the noise.

and some nights, when sleep won't
come,
he finds himself opening it.

he doesn't touch anything.
he just breathes in the faint memory of
rosewater,
and tries to remember how she folded
the shroud
without fear.

some people die with hands full of
regrets.
others die with a single word between
their teeth: **enough**.

enough joy. **enough** pain. **enough** love
to last beyond the silence.

dying well isn't about timing.
it's about presence.

to leave without leaving undone things.
to vanish without the panic of having
never existed at all.

a prayer for the final hour

let me go gently,
with no spotlight.
no sirens.
just the hush of a room
and the breath of someone
who stayed.

let me go with my name
clean in someone's mouth.
not as a wound, but a
warmth.

let me go without begging.
let me go with a story left
behind.
let me go as i should.

like a well-written final line.

i do not fear death.
i fear wasting it.
i fear not dying well.

there is a beauty in endings.
but only if you write them with your
eyes open.
only if you practice
the holy, aching, human art of letting go
gracefully.

XXVIII: *the sea that speaks*
in hunger

somewhere beneath the skin, there's a
tide that never sleeps.
you can hear it when everything else
goes quiet.
a low, salt-tongued whisper reminding
you
of everything you ever wanted and
never got.

desire doesn't arrive with fanfare.
it leaks in.
like seawater through the cracks of a
boat you thought was watertight.
and by the time you notice,
you're already sinking beautifully.

i remember that night ,
no, not the events.
just the *weight* of it.
how it pressed against my ribs like a
coastline being eroded from within.

i wasn't in love, not really.
i was just possessed
by the *idea* of being held,
the fantasy of being understood without
footnotes.
a feral wanting, wearing the mask of
something softer.

i once asked a philosopher if desire is
holy.
he said it's neither holy nor profane.
just a malfunction of memory,
the body remembering what it never
had
as if it once did.

i have dreamed of drowning
in the arms of people who only ever
knew
the surface of me.
i romanticized the undertow.

a letter from Amin, found in a bottle
long after he vanished:

*i don't know what i wanted from you.
maybe to be heard in your silence.
maybe to belong somewhere i could also
escape.*

*i fed on the way you looked away,
like i was too much. like i was just enough.*

*i am not lonely anymore.
i've just made friends with the emptiness.
taught it to play cards.
taught it to lie beside me quietly.*

*you told me once that the sea devours
its own.
maybe i was always meant to go.*

there's a peculiar cruelty in chasing a
feeling
you don't even know how to recognize
when you have it.
like trying to eat smoke
or kiss a shadow
or return to a version of yourself
that never existed.

hunger wears a thousand disguises.
sometimes it looks like ambition.
sometimes like insomnia.
sometimes like the person who almost
loved you
but stopped just before it could mean
anything.

no one teaches you how to want
without breaking things.

i've spent years just thinking.
i hoped for meaning
and gave me metaphors instead.

a wave came once,
carrying a truth i refused to hold.
it said: *you will never be full.*
and then it laughed.

so i laugh too now.
not because it's funny,
but because it's all too inevitable.
the ache. the reaching. the falling into
selves that don't hold.

we are not creatures of stillness.
we are made of tides of brief touchings
of echo.

and this life?
a long, slow drowning
in the sea we mistook for sky.

*XXIX: the unbearable weight
of being seen*

there was a time when loneliness meant
being alone.

now it means not getting any
notifications.

i yearn the kind of solitude that isn't a
diagnosis.

when you could just exist quietly,
without having to prove it, explain it,
market it.

there is a peculiar violence
in being watched all the time.
it is not the kind that draws blood,
just the kind that wears you down
like wind on stone.

every gesture becomes a performance.
every silence, a statement.
even grief has to be photogenic now.
filtered tears, poetic captions,

a touch of melancholy that's digestible
enough for your followers.

how did we get here?

there was a boy once.
i knew him but not really.
he played alone in the dirt,
built kingdoms from twigs and
bottlecaps.
he didn't know what aesthetic meant.
he didn't even know he was being
watched.
because he wasn't.

he was *free*.

now, i feel like i'm always on stage.
the audience? invisible.
but always clapping, always judging,
always asking for more.

more openness.
more honesty.
more curated vulnerability
served hot with a side of self-awareness

and a smile that says, *"i'm okay, really, i swear."*

once, Zayd said:
*"you don't share your pain.
you stage it.
you light it from the left,
write captions about healing,
and wait for applause."*

i didn't reply.
how could i?

he was right.

there are apps now that track your
moods.
you can rate your sadness from 1 to 10.
you can log your joy, record your
meltdowns.
quantify your breakdowns for posterity.
what absurdity for even an absurdist.

emotions used to be private.

sacred.

now they are content. they define one's
personality and people spend their
whole lives trying to envelop their life
around their emotions.

i once screamed into a pillow.

not because i was in pain,

but because i needed to feel something
real

without the echo of validation.

being seen is not the same as being
known.

and exposure is not the same as
closeness.

we've mistaken constant connection for
intimacy.

but a thousand eyes on you

doesn't mean a single one understands.

in this world,

you are either visible or irrelevant.

but never truly whole. they say, "*be*

yourself,"
but only the version of you that fits
inside a square frame
with good lighting
and no inconvenient truths.

Amin once wrote in his notebook:
"i hide behind jokes.
it's safer that way.
because if they laugh,
they won't notice i'm bleeding."

i found that line years later,
written beneath a coffee stain.
even his truth needed
camouflage.

i want to disappear sometimes.
not in a sad way.
in a necessary way.

like a tide receding.
like a wolf finding a cave.

like someone choosing to exist
without witness.

we talk about human connection
like it's the cure.
but no one mentions
the cost of being known in pieces,
reduced to highlights,
digested as brand.

what if being invisible
wasn't a failure
but a freedom?

there's a kind of madness in always
being perceived.
you begin to perform even for yourself.
you forget how to cry in the dark.
you forget how to speak
without rehearsing the echo.

i'm tired.

not of people
but of the versions of me they carry in
their pockets.

all slightly wrong,
all slightly correct.
for some, i am a loud speaker.
for some, i rarely talk.
people carry your face in many ways
and perhaps it is always better to not
caring about maintaining the same face
everywhere. perhaps life is not just
about caring but about living.

XXX: *myths i no longer
believe in*

*"what breaks you isn't always the truth.
sometimes, it's the story that promised not
to."*

i used to believe that good things
happen to good people.
that if you tried hard enough, prayed
hard enough, loved hard enough,
life would return the favour.
like some cosmic customer service
policy.
like the universe was fair, or even
paying attention.

but then i met people who were kind
down to their marrow and watched the
world eat them alive.
i saw cruelty thrive under warm
lighting,
heard apologies rot before they reached

the mouth.
and i understood:
life isn't a ledger.
it's just weather.
it doesn't owe us spring.

i used to believe that love was a reward.
now i know it's mostly a
misunderstanding we try to hold
together.
love does not arrive clean or earned,
it crashes, intrudes, stains.
it's loud when you want quiet
and quiet when you're begging for a
sound.

once, i believed love would save me.
now, i hope it doesn't drown me.

i still believe God is watching.
not with wrath, but with a quiet kind of
patience.

not a puppeteer,
more like a lighthouse that doesn't
move,
even when i drift away.

there were nights i fell,
and the air felt empty
but somehow, i landed anyway.

maybe God doesn't always catch you
with hands.
sometimes, he just makes sure you get
back up.

i've heard silence too,
long and echoing
but it didn't feel hollow.
it felt like space being made for me to
listen.

and in that stillness,
i learned a kind of mercy
no sermon ever taught.

i used to believe in permanence.
that people stayed, that places waited,

that moments could be frozen like
photographs
and kept inside you forever.

but everything shifts.
your childhood bedroom forgets you.
your mother's handwriting changes.
the person who swore they'd never
leave, does.

everything is already becoming
something else.
you just haven't caught up yet.

i used to believe i would grow into
myself
like a tree into its branches.
now i think i'm more like smoke,
shifting shapes, drifting toward
whatever burns.
i don't know if there is a final version of
me.
and maybe that's okay.

maybe growing up isn't solidifying,
it's learning to survive liquefaction.

i used to believe stories ended.
with closure, a bow, a lesson.
but some endings don't explain
themselves.
some just leave.
like a father.
or faith.
or the way your name sounds in
someone else's mouth
when they no longer love you.

once, when Zayd was five,
he asked his grandfather what stars
were.

*"angels," the old man said with a wink,
"they blink to let you know they're still
watching."*

Zayd believed him.

years later, in school, he learned what
stars really are.

just burning gas, light-years away,
already dead by the time we see them.
and still, every time he looked up,
a small part of him wondered
if they were watching anyway.

truth doesn't always replace the myth.
sometimes, it lives beside it.
quietly.
lonely.

**here's a short list of other myths i no
longer believe in:**

that happiness is a destination,
rather than a passing warmth on the
road to somewhere else.

that forgiveness is the only key to
freedom,

as if anger cannot be holy in its own
right.

that the past is something that can be
buried,
and not something that chooses when to
rise.

that closure is earned
and not invented like a lullaby to help
us sleep.

that honesty guarantees understanding,
as if truth were a language everyone
speaks.

that growing up means clarity,
instead of learning how to live with the
blur.

that one day someone will see you fully
and still stay,
as if love were about knowing,
not dreaming.

but here's what i do believe, now:

that unlearning is its own kind of
education.

that grieving is how we make room.

that myth is not a lie.

just a story that didn't survive the
storm.

and maybe growing up
is not about replacing dreams with facts
but about learning to hold both,
even when your hands shake.

*XXXI: how to vanish
beautifully*

step one:

do not announce it.
no fireworks. no final post.
no loud weeping in doorways.
leave like the dusk leaves the sky,
slow, unremarkable, and full of colour
only if you happen to look closely.

step two:

gather your names.
every one they gave you:
lover, prodigy, mistake, salvation.
fold them gently, like old shirts.
bury them under your tongue.
swallow nothing. chew every syllable
until it no longer fits your mouth.

step three:

forget to leave a forwarding address.
let letters arrive
to silence.

let them wonder if the silence is
deliberate.

if you are punishing them, or preserving
yourself.

let them never know.

step four:

pack light.

take only what cannot be named:

the feeling of rain on your skin at
seventeen.

the scent of your grandfather's hands.

a hunger you never learned to name.

an ache no atlas could hold.

step five:

become a rumour.

a maybe.

a ghost that doesn't haunt but hums.

when they mention you, they will

let your name taste like a question

they'll never answer the same way

twice.

step six:

resist the urge to look back.
remember Lot's wife.
remember the mirror that refused to
reflect.
remember how looking back
never kept anyone from becoming
salt or silence.

step seven:

if you must write a letter, do not send it.
leave it somewhere sea can reach it.
let it be read by no one but the tide.
you do not owe them your unravelling.
you do not need a witness to your
resurrection.

step eight:

understand this:
vanishing is not the same as dying.
some disappearances are not escape,
but return.
not retreat,
but release.

step nine:

be kind to the version of you
that stayed too long.
who answered every call,
who waited for closure like it could be
earned,
who believed that to be loved
was to be understood.

forgive them.
they were only trying to be seen.
they didn't know that sometimes
invisibility is mercy.

step ten:

once you have gone,
don't become a myth.
do not linger as a legend,
a cautionary tale,
a question mark.
be the space they grow into.
be the silence that softens their own
edges.

and when they call your name in
memory,
let it ring through their mind
like a bell in an empty chapel.
not sad.
just echoing.

final instruction:

if someone asks where you went, tell
them:

i never left.

*i just learned how to be
without needing to be seen.*

and if you must believe in something,
believe in the art of gentle exits.
believe in the sea,
the bottle that never returns,
the Gods that do not watch,
and the love that does not wait.
believe in the mercy of not being
remembered wrongly.

believe that the ones who knew you
never needed a final word.

only a beautiful silence.

you began in the mirror.

now you are the absence it no longer reflects.

and that is not a tragedy.

it is the most honest kind of freedom.

curious that you made it this far. either
you're patient, or just as lost as i was
while writing this. either way, you've
made it through something that was
never meant to be tidy.

i could say thank you,
but this wasn't for you, was it?

you just happened to arrive
as i began shedding through syllables,
folding my ache into metaphors
so it wouldn't look too much like grief.

this began with echoes,
me whispering into a room that
swallowed me whole.
now it ends with a silence
that finally fits.

no answers.
no curtain call.
no crescendo waiting in the wings.

just a chair in the corner, still warm,
the balcony still open,

and a thought unfinished,
because not every wound wants
stitching.

if something here held you,
carry it gently.
if nothing did
that's alright too, rather it is better.
not every scream finds its cave.
not every word needs an ear.

somewhere between the noise and the
nothing,
i stopped mistaking loneliness for a
curse.

somewhere between these pages and
their pauses,
i let go of the need to be witnessed. if
this is an ending, let it arrive like mist.
quiet, shapeless, impossible to mourn.
let it be a name the rain almost
remembers.
let it be the final blink before sleep.

this wasn't a journey.
this was a funeral for the mask.
this was a eulogy written in real time.

and now,
with no applause,
no witness,
no prophecy, i disappear.

i was here.
i was loud.
i was nothing.
i was enough.
was i anything?

[bayna departs, farewell]